

## BROADCAST BEGINNINGS: BY SOLDIERS FOR SOLDIERS

The U.S. Armed Services have always concerned themselves with the morale of their soldiers in the field — particularly those assigned in foreign countries far away from American diversions and entertainment. During World War I, the Army involved itself with such obvious morale actions as improvement of billets, the granting and extension of leaves and the encouragement of athletics and live entertainment. Private groups, such as the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus, and the American Red Cross supplied a large part of the recreation services for the troops.

In the months after the conclusion of fighting in France in late 1918, General John J. Pershing ordered a study to determine the level of morale of the men in the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF). The study was to establish a system to constantly inform the Headquarters "as to the factors that undermine the morale of the troops, [to be] continually in touch with the shifting situation as regards recreation and kindred needs." Supervised by the G-1 (Personnel) Section of the General Staff, the command could "call to the attention of appropriate Army Sections steps that could improve the spirit of the troops, and to stimulate the work of the nonmilitary societies."<sup>(1)</sup>

The study acknowledged that during the war and even after the Armistice, "In the pressure of more urgent matters, the question of morale had to be given scant attention." As a result, neither the Army nor the private organizations had made any real coordinated effort to provide morale services to the troops. Many of the units in the field were, "Either inadequately served or not served at all, while in other places there [was] duplication and competition between the Societies." In the Northern Argonne Section, for example, it was impossible to "find a single representative of any of the agencies, or even so much as a baseball, a bar of chocolate, or a magazine."<sup>(2)</sup>

However, by the summer of 1919, no less than seven private organizations were working with the United States troops in France. These included the YMCA, the YWCA, the National Catholic War Council (Knights of Columbus), the Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, the American Library Association and the Red Cross. A report made by civilian War Department official Raymond Fosdick, noted that the organizations functioned directly under the Administrative Section of

General Pershing's staff. He added, "They work hard to coordinate and adjust their lines of work so as to eliminate overlapping and duplication. Added to the tremendous project of education, athletics and entertainment that the Army itself is coordinating, the work of these societies helps to form what is probably the largest and most comprehensive leisure-time program ever undertaken."<sup>(3)</sup>

Fosdick's continuing investigation of the morale problem concluded, "The effort of all this work upon the future citizenship of the United States is incalculable, and the American people can take pride in their own generous participation in its successful prosecution."

Even so, his report expressed serious reservations about the military's use of private organizations to provide the leisure time services to military troops. The sectarian basis of the organizations had led to the stimulation of rivalries and a jockeying of position. That was "disheartening to witness and discouraging to cope with. To see the representatives of these different agencies vying with each other in an attempt to make one last good impression upon their returning troops is to despair of the whole system of social work in the war."<sup>(4)</sup>

If the United States ever had to send men into battle again, Fosdick concluded, the Army would have to take real steps to eliminate "religious stratification." This could be done by "reducing to the lowest possible minimum the number of organizations working directly with the troops in camp or in the field. There is no reason," he said, "a single non-sectarian organization in this war should not have handled the whole problem of recreation of the Army. Morale is as important as ammunition and is just as legitimate a charge against the public treasury."<sup>(5)</sup>

Fosdick felt that recreational facilities provided by the Army itself would satisfy the troops better than those that the private agencies had created. The soldier "is instinctively interested in the thing that he does himself," he said. "The experience of the war shows that the clubs or huts run by the troops themselves were apt to be more popular than those managed by the societies. [Likewise,] the theatrical exhibitions staged by the soldiers created a deeper and wider interest in the camps than the plays of professional talent."<sup>(6)</sup>

This occurred, Fosdick said, because the "soldier is keen to detect and quick to resent any condescension or patronage from those who serve him. He's first of all an American citizen and he asks for no charity." Thus it was time for the Army to take over all leisure-time, morale-building activities from the private enterprise. He argued, "Baseballs and books and all the other factors that make for a rounded life are an essential part of the nation's direct responsibility toward its troops."<sup>(7)</sup>

As the Army returned to peacetime, however, the need for highly organized recreation and entertainment declined in proportion to the reduction in manpower. After the AEF returned to the United States, the Army maintained an overseas presence only in Hawaii, Panama, and the Philippines. Only the latter two locales qualified as "foreign duty stations" where the local language wasn't English.

The Army's primary effort at providing recreation itself centered on organized athletics. This included detailing former West Point football players to Hawaii to supervise the enlisted men's athletic programs. Officers did not participate beyond coaching. Their own recreation focused more on golf and tennis (Schofield Barracks to this day still boasts a great golf course). Other than athletics, the Army of the period left the men to fill their free time themselves.

Like the nation as a whole, soldiers turned more and more to the growing medium of radio following World War I. In the United States, commercial broadcasting supplied the news, sports, and entertainment. The soldier audience received programs only in those areas where a concentration of military facilities existed. In the Philippines and Panama, they could listen to English language stations established there for the U. S. civilians working for the American government and commercial companies.

#### PHILIPPINE BEGINNINGS

It was not until February, 1939, that KGEI in San Francisco began beaming shortwave broadcasts to the Philippines with programming oriented to the U.S. military.<sup>(8)</sup> KGEI had its origins as a General Electric G.E. Company exhibit at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition held on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. The company had developed a state-of-the-art shortwave transmitter equipped with an antenna that could beam broadcasts either west to Asia or south to Latin America from the Exposition's House of Magic. The only problem was that General Electric had no programming for the station to air. When Buck Harris, the company's public relations representative at the Exposition, pointed out the deficiency, G. E. gave him the job of manning the facility and of developing programming. Their only guidance for Harris was to broadcast unbiased news and music to Asia four hours a day, to Latin America three hours a day, and to develop good will.<sup>(9)</sup>

As a journalist with no radio experience, Harris approached his job much as an editor would running a newspaper city desk. He used news from the wire services and music from transcriptions. He interviewed foreign dignitaries from the Orient or Latin America who visited the Exposition. Almost immediately, cablegrams

and letters began pouring into the studio, reporting on the reception and expressing appreciation for the news and music. Listeners further encouraged KGEI to serve as a counterpoint to the Japanese Radio Tokyo that broadcast throughout Asia. Ultimately, KGEI became the model for the U.S. Government's own shortwave news and entertainment efforts following Pearl Harbor.<sup>(10)</sup>

In 1942, after the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, KGEI became directly involved in the American military effort. General Douglas MacArthur requested from Bataan that the station broadcast warnings about counterfeit Filipino currency that the Japanese were flooding into the areas they seized. KGEI announcers advised their audience in English and native dialects about the worthless money. "They are doing this in order to strip your stores and farms at no cost to themselves," the announcements said. "Do not accept this counterfeit money made in Japan. Be on your guard." Apparently their announcements made an impact. Within two weeks, the Japanese-controlled station in Manila and Radio Tokyo began transmitting stern warnings. Any Filipino questioning the value of the occupation army's money would be shot or imprisoned.<sup>(11)</sup>

During the fight for the Philippines, KGEI became the primary source of news and information for MacArthur's men as they waged their losing battle against the Japanese invaders. Using a 1,000-watt transmitter taken from Manila, the American troops set up a small station on Bataan. From there they picked up and then rebroadcast news and entertainment beamed from KGEI in San Francisco. When MacArthur moved his headquarters to Corregidor at the end of December, his men brought the transmitter along.<sup>(12)</sup>

Manual Quezon, the President of the Philippines, Carlos Romulo, publisher of the *Philippine Herald* and General MacArthur all collaborated to get the new station on the air. Upon arrival on Corregidor, Quezon told Romulo that they needed to put a station on the air as quickly as possible. "We must establish communication with our people and with the men on Bataan," he explained. The two Filipino leaders approached General MacArthur. He agreed and directed his radio technicians to begin broadcasting within 48 hours. By January 1, 1942, they were on the air. When Romulo asked MacArthur for a name for the station, he replied, "*The Voice of Freedom*."<sup>(13)</sup>

Once in operation, the station concentrated on counteracting propaganda and false information that the Japanese were broadcasting from a captured station in Manila. Broadcasts encouraged those Americans still fighting on Bataan. The programs included commentaries, items of local interest, and selections from phonograph records that the retreating forces had brought with them. Romulo

also broadcast appeals to the Filipino and American people to unite against the Japanese invaders. He later wrote, "Day after day I broadcast over our makeshift radio the words and courage of the stalwart, indomitable MacArthur and the frail, indomitable Quezon." Near the end of the siege, when the President was considering returning to Manila, Romulo broadcast a particularly strong appeal. He modestly recalls, "It was a blockbuster of a broadcast if I may say so. I was desperate and pulled no punches. I declared the Filipinos were fighting as never before, determined to hold on and keep faith in America." (14)

Although Quezon ultimately escaped into exile with Romulo, the President immediately criticized his friend's broadcast for offering false hope. One American officer noted that the propaganda on "The Voice of Freedom" was "so thick, it served no purpose except to disgust us and incite mistrust of all hopes." Ironically, the American troops learned of the deteriorating military situation in the Philippines from listening to the more objective broadcasts of KGEI. Each night, KGEI broadcasted a program called "Freedom for the Philippines." (15)

#### U. S. MILITARY BROADCAST BEGINNINGS

While MacArthur's "Voice of Freedom" is an important part of early AFRTS history, it was not the first United States military radio station. By the time it began broadcasting from Corregidor in January, 1942, soldiers in the Panama Canal Zone and Alaska had already put stations on the air.

The first station in Panama began as a purely military requirement. The Panama Coast Artillery Command (PCAC) began establishing an extensive defense alert network of fortified emplacements to protect the Canal in early 1940. This included moving anti-aircraft units of the 73rd and 83rd Coast Artillery Corps from garrison duty to jungle positions. For communication between the headquarters and the artillerymen scattered throughout the country, the Command used several "picnic type" radio receivers. They located the transmitter for the alert system in the basement of the Panama Coast Artillery Command barracks at Quarry Heights in the Canal Zone. However, the command quickly discovered that either the units in the field were turned off or the soldiers weren't monitoring the radios. Either way, it was impossible to call test alerts. (16)

As editor of the *Panama Coast Artillery News*, the local service paper, Sergeant Wayne Woods received a request from the Artillery Command. They needed "maximum publicity" to keep the radios in the field turned on. Woods discussed the problem with Technical Sergeant Joseph Whitehead, who was in charge of the radio transmitter, and with Master Sergeant Paul Doster, the

command Public Relations NCO. The three servicemen came up with an idea. They'd play popular music over the air. Surely, the troops in the outlying positions would be more likely to listen to the radio if it provided entertainment. (17)

Major General Sanderford Jarman, Commanding General of the PCAC, liked the idea. He gave the recommendation his "wholehearted approval" and instructed the troop morale officer to get the necessary recordings. Early in 1940, broadcasts began on a regular schedule with Whitehead in charge of the project. The station, manned by three full-time operators, took PCAC as its call letters. (18)

PCAC soon took on an additional function. General Jarman wanted more news about current world developments reaching his men in the jungle. With the budding radio station in place, he asked Woods to read news copy over the air. As Woods recalls, the first newscast consisted of his reading the *Panama Star and Herald*, a local morning paper. Each weekday, one of the NCO's read the major stories from the paper. On Sunday, the staff produced a half-hour newscast summarizing the week's news based on stories from the current *Time* magazine. (19)

In the beginning, the station operated on a hit-and-miss basis with little idea about what the next day's broadcast schedule would be. Nonetheless, by April, 1941, the morale of the troops had improved remarkably as a result of the music and news. The *Panama Coast Artillery News* began to provide operating funds to the station to ensure regularly scheduled programming.

#### NETWORK PROGRAM BEGINNINGS

As the station became more and more popular among the troops and civilians in the Canal Zone, Master Sergeant Doster, the Public Relations NCO, suggested that the staff get stateside programs to air. Woods had the same idea and he had been in correspondence with members of the radio and motion picture communities. Therefore, he undertook the assignment of writing letters to such radio notables as Jack Benny, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope asking for transcriptions of their broadcasts. According to Woods, the "replies were spontaneous." Jack Benny, for one, offered regular transcriptions at no charge. His program, on an autographed disk, became the first network show to be broadcast. (20)

In September, 1941, NBC saluted PCAC in a nationwide hookup with a program featuring many radio stars and personalities. The network followed up this effort by sending 2,000 pounds of transcribed NBC programs to the Panama station, literally a ton of programming! By December, the station had become a full-time operation.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7,

PCAC went off the air at 4:00 PM. They feared the transmitter might help the attacking Japanese aircraft vector into the canal from the sea. Thus ended military broadcasting in the Canal Zone until January, 1943, when the station went back on the air as part of a new, growing AFRS organization.(21)

### ALASKA BEGINNINGS

Like the "Voice of Freedom" station and PCAC, the first station in Alaska had a short life. However, its creation and operation followed a similar pattern -- soldiers fulfilling soldiers' needs for entertainment and information in a remote location.

Responding to the increasing tensions with Japan, the War Department began to send troops to Alaska in early 1941. Units stationed in widely scattered locales found themselves with little to do in their spare time. Alaska had few commercial radio stations. None reached the remote military bases. In mid-March, 1941, however, two servicemen in Sitka began broadcasting to their fellow soldiers in an attempt to fill the void in news and entertainment. Using makeshift equipment and the call letters KRB, the men played records that they scrounged from other soldiers. They also recruited local talent to play live music and perform short skits. Ultimately, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) found out about the unauthorized station and ordered it shut down.(22)

### ARMY BROADCASTING BEGINNINGS

Although PCAC and KRB went on the air earlier, the honor of being the first Army broadcast operation to continue without interruption goes to another. In October, 1941, soldiers at Fort Greely, then located on Alaska's Kodiak Island, went on the air with Station KODK. On the remote island, the only access the troops had to radio were shortwave broadcasts from KGEI in San Francisco. Occasionally, they received AM programs from U.S. stations when atmospheric conditions permitted. According to *The Williwaws*, the Kodiak Naval Air Station newsletter, even these were subject to interference from "electric razors, adding machines, automobile ignition, and loose connections." (23)

At Fort Greely, as at Sitka, it was again the soldiers themselves who took it upon themselves to start a station for their buddies' news and entertainment. Captain William Adams, the base finance officer, was a former radio station employee in San Francisco. He placed a notice in the post newsletter announcing a meeting for anyone interested in starting a radio station. Twelve men responded. Adams divided them into an engineering committee to assemble a small transmitter, and a production committee to develop programming, find talent and put on trial shows. The first experimental "broadcast"

took place on October 28, 1941, a quarter-hour variety program consisting of a live band, singers, and a skit staged in the lounge of the officers' quarters. With Adams signaling his modulation cues through the window, a crystal mike picked up the show. A cable carried it next door to the mess hall. From there it aired over a loud speaker.(24) What a beginning!

The initial "broadcast" had an immediate impact on the civilian employees who were constructing military facilities on the island. Right away, they recognized the benefit of expanding the radio service. In three separate lotteries, the workers raised money. J.C. Henry, the contractor's general superintendent, used the funds to purchase a 15-watt transmitter, a turntable, microphones and other equipment. When the components arrived in early December, the "engineering committee" assembled them in the base's ordinance building. Test broadcasts for a few hours a day began with the program reaching all over the base and into the town of Kodiak.(25)

Even before the station officially went on the air, it became clear that a real studio would be needed to house the equipment. Henry and his builders again came through by volunteering their time to build a station on an empty piece of land near Lake Louise. By the end of December, they completed the studios, a control room, practice areas for performers, offices, and an auditorium seating 100 with standing room for 200 more. KODK, as the staff named the new station, began full-time operations on January 1, 1942, broadcasting from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM with enough power to reach throughout the island.(26)

Early KODK programs consisted primarily of recorded music and newscasts produced by a volunteer staff. Besides providing entertainment, KODK immediately began to serve as an informational outlet. The island commander, General Charles Corlett, used the radio station to offer an early radio commentary on the current status of the war.

"Every day finds us a little better prepared to beat off an attack," he said. "Ours is a unique establishment. Never before in the history of the United States has there been a combination naval and military base with a joint responsibility between the two services. Yet we work together in perfect harmony -- pulling shoulder to shoulder to accomplish our common mission." Corlett also praised the construction workers' efforts in supporting KODK. The civilians working with the military symbolized the unified war effort.(27)

According to the base newspaper, the *Kodiak Bear*, the station was "into full cadence" by the middle of January. It was broadcasting "a full schedule of news, music variety programs, and talks by the command. Entertainment shows were arranged using talented directors,

musicians and comedians from various units stationed at the Post." In the first days of operation, it took only four hours to play through the station's entire record library. Soon, the selections improved as people brought in their own discs. Live programming included shows which each unit produced by gathering talent from the construction force and the local populace.

Regardless of the initial limitations imposed by the small record library and the somewhat limited abilities of the amateur performers, KODK met with immediate success. In a front page story, *The Williwaws* called the station "the best thing that has hit this area since the last boatload of nurses arrived. That seems to be the general idea around the camp as the nifty little outfit, operating at 1300-KW now, enters its fourth week of broadcasting." (28) Quite a review!

The quality of live performances received a temporary boost in March when comedian Joe E. Brown arrived in Kodiak during his one-man, 33-day tour of Alaskan military facilities. KODK was the only military radio station in operation during his travels and Brown appeared on the air several times during his stay. He also contributed to later programming after he got back to Hollywood by having his friends in the entertainment business send transcriptions of their radio broadcasts to KODK. (29)

In May, KODK did its first remote, covering the dedication of a new chapel by hooking an amplifier into a telephone line. After that, the station carried the Sunday chapel services every week. The station also provided a regular schedule of programs from each of the base's units. Music ranged from mountain to cowboy to big band style. The "Kodiak Press Club" performed a series of extravaganzas from murder mysteries to tales of thwarted love. Ultimately, the station survived and prospered through hard work and detailed planning. It produced balanced programs providing radio fare of interest to all segments of its audience. (30)

In November, KODK moved to temporary quarters in the Post library building while its facilities on Lake Louise underwent remodeling to improve broadcast quality. Workers constructed better soundproofing in the three studios and set the control room on four concrete blocks to assure stability for its equipment. On December 5, the station returned to its newly renovated building with the new call letters WVCX -- and an official operating license from the FCC. (31)

Elsewhere, other stations began to appear on military bases throughout Alaska. At Sitka, in February, 1942, soldiers ignored the previous problem between the FCC and KRB and again started a station to provide entertainment and news. Private Charles Gilliam, a radio technician in civilian life, and Charles Green and Chet Iverson,

who were ham radio operators, had trained together at Camp McQuade, California. There they had decided to take radio parts and ham gear with them to their remote Alaskan post. A cooperative buddy in supply shipped the equipment to Sitka as "military equipment."

On arrival, Gilliam and Private Robert Nelson rigged a small transmitter and began broadcasting music directly from an old phonograph within a construction shack. They had no microphone to make announcements or to identify the source of the music, so the "broadcast" that reached only the nearby barracks, had no call letters, news or schedule. (32)

Encouraged by the response from the troops, the fledgling broadcasters painted the call letters GAB (standing for *Gil And Bob*) on the side of the shack and began expanding their operation. Donations began to come in to help improve the facility. On April 5, having acquired a "live" capability, the soldiers did their first remote, broadcasting the Easter Service from the Post Theater using the new call letters KRAY. As with KODK, they structured their early programming in a loose and informal way, to say the least. Soldiers assigned to regular military duties volunteered at the station during off hours -- usually learning their jobs as they went along. (33)

As KRAY grew in size and popularity, the commander of the base, Colonel Walter Shoaff, approved the construction of a permanent facility containing three studios and four offices. The main studio seated 100 people for live broadcasts. In its new building, the station officially went on the air August 16th, with a ninety-minute live variety show that included several bands, solo performances, and a dramatic skit. Local citizens also contributed to the programming. Broadcasting from 11:00 AM to 10:00 PM, the station received a license from the FCC and the official call letters WVCX on November 19, 1942. (34)

Like KODK and the other stations that were springing up, KRAY initially had problems acquiring enough recorded material to sustain its operation. The transcriptions of commercial network shows, often arriving months after their stateside airing, helped to fill the stations' schedules even though they appeared on an irregular basis. A \$1,000 donation from Sitka residents and service clubs helped pay for a Lang-Worth transcription library for the station. A local citizen described the station as "one of the greatest things ever to happen to Sitka." (35)

The emergence and success of the Alaska stations proved that the need existed for regular radio programming to provide news and recreation for our U. S. military. Despite the obstacles, the soldiers in the field would find a way to put more of them on the air.

The haphazard, uncoordinated development of the

first Alaskan stations demonstrated one other fact. To improve morale and satisfy military requirements for reaching troops with command information and education would require a more organized broadcast operation. True. But, no one despised the humble beginnings.

## NOTES - CHAPTER 2

- (1)Memorandum for General Pershing on Morale in the American Expeditionary Force, February 1, 1919.
- (2)Ibid.
- (3)Report to the Secretary of War on the Activities of Welfare Organizations Serving with the A.E.F., June 1, 1919, p.1.
- (4)Ibid, pp 1, 61.
- (5)Ibid, pp 7, 8.
- (6)Ibid, p 8.
- (7)Ibid, pp 8,9.
- (8)History of American Forces Philippines Network (AFPN), 1939 to December 31, 1968.
- (9)Frank Taylor, "He Bombs Tokyo Every Day," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 25, 1942, p. 10.
- (10)Ibid.
- (11)Ibid.
- (12)Ibid.
- (13)Evelyn Wells, Carlos P. Romulo, *Voice of Freedom*, p. 100,
- (14)Ibid, Carlos Romulo, *I Walked With Heros*, Avon Books, 1961, pp 161-164.
- (15)Romulo, *I Walked With Heros*, pp 164-165; Louis Morton, *The Fall Of The Philippines*, p 62.
- (16)Letter from MSgt Wayne Woods to Captain Damon Eckles, OIC, Public Affairs Office, Clark AFRS, the Philippines, October 26, 1953.
- (17)Ibid.
- (18)Ibid.
- (19)Ibid.
- (20)*The Jungle Murder*, September 23, 1944.
- (21)Ibid.
- (22)Charles Gilliam interview with Ervin Green, September 7, 1982; E.M. Goddard, Speech on WVCX, Sifka, August 16, 1943.
- (23)*The Williwaaws*, November 8, 1941.
- (24)*Kodiak Bear*, June 9, 1942.
- (25)Ibid; *Williwaaws*, December 6, 1941; Interview with Pauline Magnusen, August 10, 1983.
- (26)*Kodiak Bear*, January 10, 1942; *Kodiak Bear*, June 9, 1942.
- (27)*Kodiak Bear*, January 17, 1942.
- (28)Ibid; Magnusen interview; *Williwaaws*, January 24, 1942
- (29)*Kodiak Bear*, June 9, 1974.
- (30)Ibid; Interview with William Adams, September 14, 1982; Interview with Ole Johnson, August 10, 1983.
- (31)Ibid; *Kodiak Bear*, November 18, 1942; Vivian Lawhead Diary, December 5, 1942.
- (32)Interview with Charles Gilliam, August 2, 1983.
- (33)Ibid.
- (34)Ibid.
- (35)Military telegram, August 14, 1942.